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Carrie Lane Chapman Catt and her Mason City Experience

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MASON CITY PUBLIC LIBRARY HISTORICAL COLLECTION

and her Mason City Experience

BY LOUISE ROSENFIELD NOUN

LONG BEFORE Iowan Carrie Lane Chapman Catt (1859-1947) led the woman-suffrage forces of the United States to final victory with the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920, she was a young educator and journalist in Mason City, Iowa. Long before she was internationally known for her work for world peace, she was embroiled in spiteful political battles in Cerro Gordo County. And long before she was acknowledged as a forceful public speaker defending women's rights, she found her own husband to be her most vocal and impassioned defender.

By the turn of the century, Chapman Catt

Carrie Lane (photo circa 1882).

had become a nationally known public figure. Yet throughout her life she guarded her privacy so carefully that little is known about her personal life. She apparently destroyed all letters to or from Leo Chapman, whom she met and married in Mason City, and from George Catt, her second husband. Nor are there diaries or papers from family members in her archives in the Library of Congress.

Therefore one must look to other sources for glimpses of her personal life and of her earliest political battles. Mason City newspapers for the years 1881 through 1885 help a great deal to lift the veil off Carrie Lane Chapman Catt's unhappy experience as a school teacher in that community and subsequently as co-editor of the Mason City *Republican* with her husband, Leo Chapman. In the same manner, Mason City newspapers in the following decades reveal significant changes in her local reputation, spurred on by her growing national fame.

Born in Wisconsin in 1859, Carrie was the daughter of Maria Clinton Lane and Lucius Lane. Her parents moved to a farm near Charles City, Iowa, when she was seven years old. Among the periodicals that came regularly into the Lane home was the Chicago *Inter Ocean*. The periodical carried a column by the feminist Elizabeth Boynton Harbert, which introduced Carrie to the issues of the women's movement and provided lifelong inspiration for her own feminist activities. After graduating from Charles City High School, she earned enough money by teaching to realize her ambition of attending Iowa State Agricultural College in Ames (now Iowa State University), where she graduated in 1880, the top student and the only woman in her seventeen-member class. During the following year Carrie taught in rural schools and also read law in the office of a Charles City friend. In the fall of 1881 she accepted an offer to teach in the Mason City high school.

At the time Carrie began her teaching career, Mason City was a fast-growing community of three thousand surrounded by rich farm land. The town was proud of its new Union School, a three-story stone structure set on a hill with a 75-foot-high belfry. The one hundred high school students were taught by a faculty of three: the principal, F. B. Gault, who taught Latin; Carrie, his first assistant, who taught science and history; and a Miss Perrett who taught math and English.

Union School (later renamed Central School) also housed the primary grades, taught by nine teachers. Although there were nearly nine hundred children of school age in Mason City during the 1881/82 school year, only seven hundred were registered as students, and attendance varied from term to term. Nevertheless, the building was so crowded that split sessions were held with children going to school half-days. A new four-room grade school was under construction.

Gault, who was serving his first year as superintendent of schools as well as high school principal, used a policy of "no violent changes, no sudden unsettling of old conditions and methods" in his administration of the schools. Gault reported to the Mason City *Republican* that his philosophy was that of "collecting and rearranging the scattered threads, perfecting what was good, gradually introducing what was better." Yet there were problems. Discipline was "most difficult" because of overcrowded school rooms. Teachers were trying the "moral suasion plan" but despite "constant effort and kind means," discipline was not always what could be desired. Measles had "reduced attendance completely" during mid-term exams, but Gault apparently did not require make-up tests.

GAULT RESIGNED at the end of the 1882/83 school year. Twenty-three-year-old Carrie applied for and was given the positions of superintendent and principal vacated by Gault—even though her critics said a woman was not physically capable of disciplining students. They contended that the job needed a strong man.

When Carrie began her new duties in the fall of 1883 she set out to demonstrate that she was indeed capable of being a strong disciplinarian. On her first day in office, after she had finished teaching her high school classes, she took a two-foot-long leather strap onto which she had stitched a loop handle and proceeded to seek out the worst truants in the primary grades. These students were called out of class one at a time and given a whipping. A total of nine boys were punished that day. The strap, which

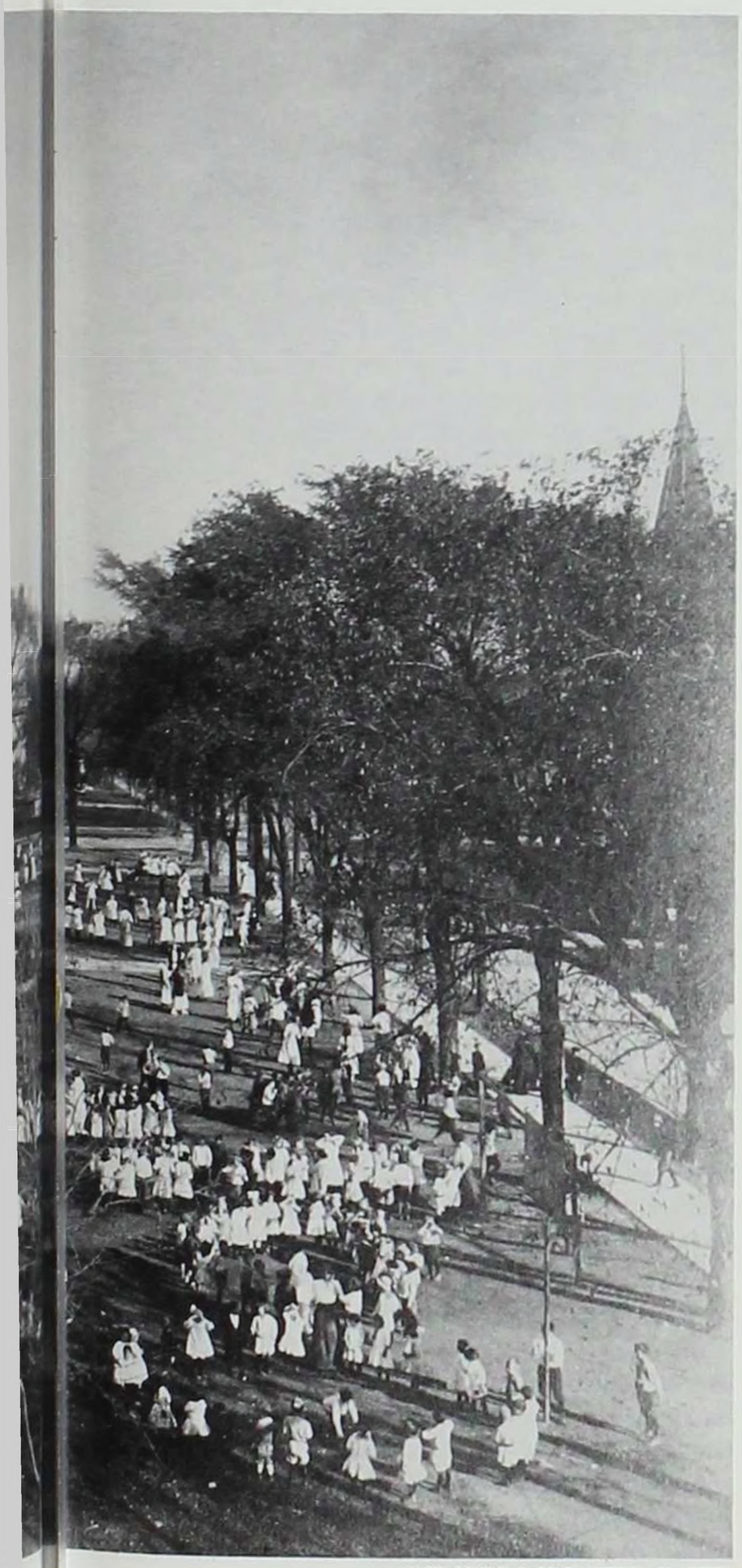
Carrie kept on display in her office, was a reminder to all children of the punishment that would be meted out if they were unruly.

Carrie also developed strict rules in order to limit the number of students who brought their lunch to school and to alleviate noise and disorder at lunch time. Only those children who lived too far away to go home for lunch were allowed to eat at school. These children were given ten minutes free time when the morning

session ended to get water to drink with their lunch and to go to the toilet. Then they returned to their classrooms for lunch and the school doors were locked. Thirty minutes before the afternoon session began the doors were unlocked. The students who had eaten lunch at school were now free to play outside, and those returning from home could go in if they wished.

To encourage punctuality and attendance, Carrie gave a half-day holiday each term to the room having the best record in these respects, and cards of honor were given to younger children who did not miss a day of school each month. Pupils were instructed in the rules of politeness, and by December it was reported that there was a marked improvement in the deportment of high school students.

Academic standards were also raised. So many pupils received low marks in the fall-term examinations that they were given an opportunity to better their grades by taking a second test. When the high school seniors fell behind in their work, Carrie kept them in class during



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FROM MARY GRAY PECK, *CARRIE CHAPMAN CATT: A BIOGRAPHY* (NEW YORK: H.W. WILSON, 1944) REPRINTED WITH PERMISSION

Left: The pride of Mason City in the early 1880s, the three-story Union School housed elementary grades and the high school. With at least seven hundred pupils, the school was overcrowded. When Carrie Lane became principal, she set out to curb discipline and space problems with reforms. (The school was later renamed Central School; photo circa 1912). Above: Carrie (center) and other Union faculty.

the two-week spring vacation—giving up her own vacation time as well in order to help them.

CARRIE'S administrative reforms seem to have met with opposition early in her regime, as reflected by a somewhat defensive tone in a weekly column of school news published in the Mason City *Republican*. The first column, which appeared in late September, announced that the purpose of this series was to inform parents about school affairs in order to correct wrong impressions that "are many times formed by the reports of younger pupils who incorrectly understand what is said and done." A week later the second column asked, "Why is it that our school does not have more visitors? . . . People often become prejudiced against a school by the report from their children. It should be the duty of parents to investigate for themselves." Although the columns were reportedly written by the Philomathean Society, the high school literary society, much of the material sounded as though it was written by Carrie herself.

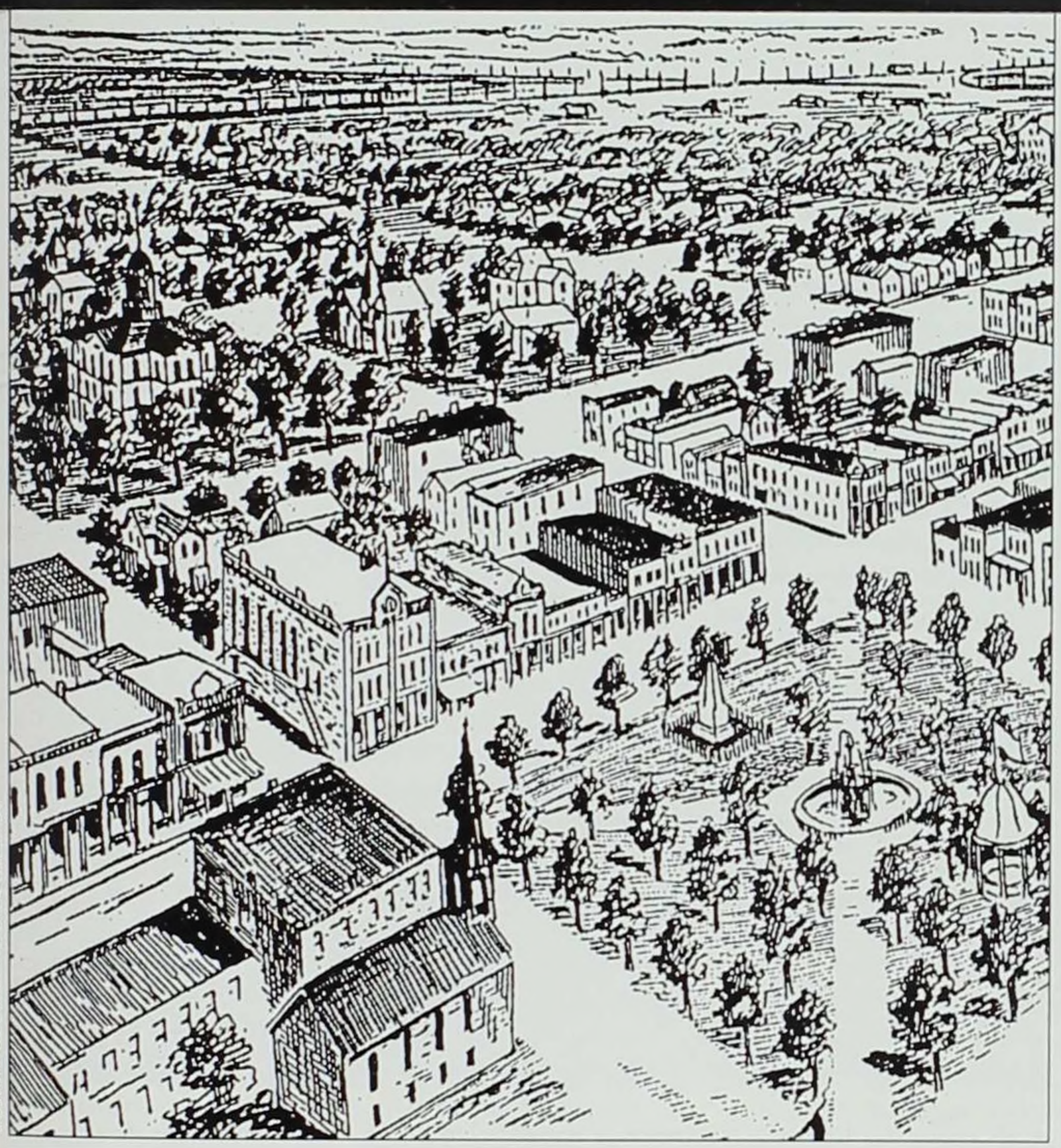
Carrie's first months as superintendent of schools were also marked by her unhappy involvement in local politics. Cerro Gordo County, like all of Iowa, was strongly Republican. Only occasionally had Democrats been elected to county office, and then on independent tickets. In September 1883, for the first time in the county's history, the Democrats managed to nominate a full slate for county office. Since there were not enough Democrats to fill all the slots on the ticket the names of several Republicans were used, probably without their consent. Among these Republicans was Carrie, nominated for county superintendent of schools (an elective position in contrast to her appointive position as superintendent of Mason City schools).

According to the Mason City *Express*, a Republican paper, "The attempt to make [Carrie] a candidate was from the first in bad faith." The paper said she had been persuaded to run by the "specious arguments" of men "who had set out to get that lady into a bad position with the community." It seems as though Carrie had been tempted to accept the nomination because she wanted to be county superintendent, but in doing so she would have been looked on as a traitor to the Republican party, which represented the power structure in the community. The Republican party was also the party to which Carrie held emotional ties—even though as a woman she could not vote—because the Democratic party was still vilified as the party that had opposed the Civil War. The Democratic party also opposed prohibition, which Carrie ardently believed in.

ABOUT THIS TIME, the fall of 1883, Carrie Lane met Leo Chapman, a young editor who had recently purchased the *Republican*. For Carrie and Leo, it was apparently love at first sight. Within two weeks they were engaged to be married.

Born in Indiana in 1857, Leo had moved with his parents to Marshall County, Iowa, when he was thirteen. Here he helped his family farm. Apparently largely self-educated, Leo was well read; Carrie would later boast that he had studied Greek and Latin. He was an ardent Republican, and, like Carrie, a prohibitionist, a religious liberal, and an enthusiastic supporter of women's rights.

In 1878 Leo had taken a job with the *Iowa State Register* in Des Moines, where he quickly worked his way up from typesetter to city editor. He covered the House of Representatives for the *Register* during the 1882 session of the Iowa General Assembly. By 1883 he had saved enough money to purchase the Mason City



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Below: Leo Chapman and Carrie Lane met in the fall of 1883. Owner and editor of the Mason City *Republican*, Leo had his newspaper office in the basement of the three-story Opera House (in drawing, the building between the Union School and the town square). After they married, Carrie and Leo set up housekeeping in rooms above the newspaper.

Republican, which he took over on April 10 of that year. Ret Clarkson, owner of the *Register*, gave Leo a laudatory send-off. He knew of no young man with "a more flattering promise of a useful career" and praised him as "an editorial writer of decided ability" who was "intensely in love with his profession." Clarkson said that Leo had the enthusiasm and pride that would guarantee excellent work: "The honors are surely waiting for him."

In his salutatory editorial in the *Republican*, Leo declared that his goal was to "promote the interests of Mason City and Cerro Gordo County in every honorable respect." The *Republican*, he wrote, "will be kept to a high standard of truth, right, justice and morality. Its columns will not be disgraced by personal abuse, private quarrels or offensive matter of any sort." Leo also assured his readers that he had come to Mason City to make his home there and that he intended to stay.

Leo's newspaper was not his only passion; his

FROM MARY GRAY PECK, *CARRIE CHAPMAN CATT: A BIOGRAPHY* (NEW YORK: H.W. WILSON, 1944) REPRINTED WITH PERMISSION

infatuation with Carrie made him her ardent defender that fall, and before long he seemed to have lost all sense of proportion in his indignation over her critics. Even so, one must keep in mind that small-town newspapers were considered the personal vehicles of their editor-owners for the expression of their political views. A rough, give-and-take journalism was commonplace.

Leo was outraged over Carrie's unsought nomination for county superintendent of schools on the Democratic ticket, and called it "an intolerable insult." He thanked God that "though a woman may not vote, she has voice enough to veto such an infamous attempt to add respectability to such loathsome politics as the Democrats have surrendered to this year." He deplored the futile attempts of the Democrats "to put a partisan complexion into our public schools" and hailed "the plucky woman" in her refusal to run, offering "three cheers for the schoolmam in the schoolhouse on the hill." "All the boys are in love with her—or ought to be," he exclaimed. "No saloonocrats can capture her." It is obvious that Leo was enamored of Carrie. The courtship that led to their engagement probably began at this time.

Soon after Carrie refused to run, the Mason City *Times*, a paper owned and edited by a Democrat, accused her of teaching politics in school, complaining that there had been a program on the feminist Lucretia Mott and also a debate on the subject of woman suffrage. Once again, Leo rose to Carrie's defense. "She teaches only truth, morality and principles," he said. "If she had been crazy enough to accept the dishonor of a candidacy on the Saloon ticket, the great unwashed would have had no complaints about her."

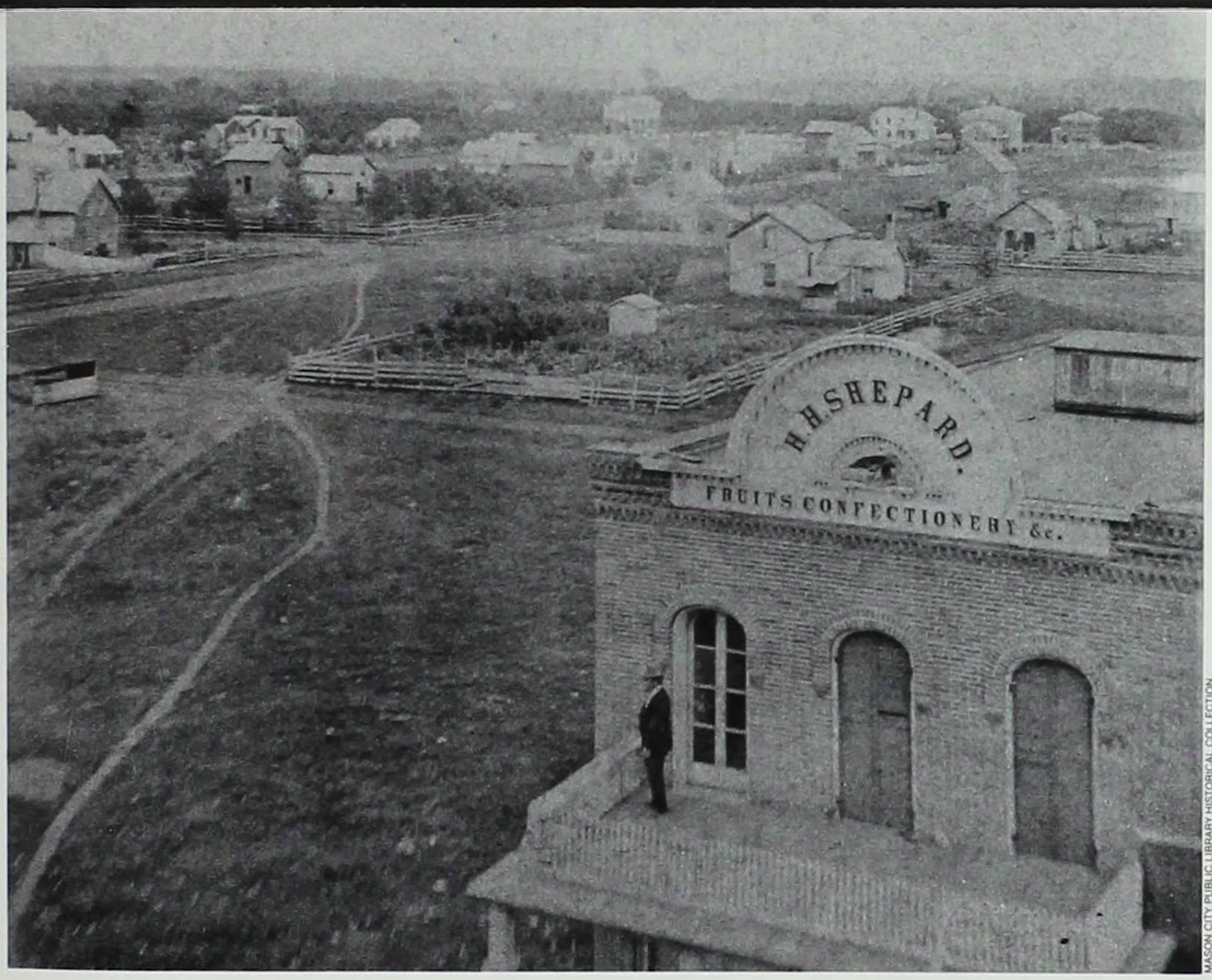
Leo, in turn, was accused of having teamed up with the Republican members of the Mason City school board to pressure Carrie not to run for county superintendent. "Miss Lane has not been talked to," he said. "She declines on principle only."

Despite Carrie's announced refusal to accept the office of county superintendent of schools, even if elected, her name was left on the Democratic ballot. She received 895 votes in the November elections. L. L. Klinefelter, the Republican nominee, won with 1,405 votes.

MEANWHILE, criticism of Carrie's administration of the Mason City schools increased as the year progressed. Her strict grading policy angered parents of children who had received low marks in the fall examinations. In an attempt to stop fault-finding, she devised a dual examination system for the mid-term tests in January. One test was given by the teacher. Another test was given by a committee of lay persons appointed by Carrie. The pupil received the average of the grades on the two examinations.

Although the school column in the *Republican* called the mid-term committee examinations a decided success, Carrie was criticized by both the *Times* and the *Express* for this committee system as well as for her rigid discipline. A handbill titled "Nostrae Scholae" was circulated around town and listed five complaints about Carrie. First, she had changed the seats of older high school students and forced them to sit with younger classes. Second, boys and girls were required to use the same coat rooms for the first time. Third, because the older classes had been deprived of privileges they had previously enjoyed, their enthusiasm for their studies was now diminished. Fourth, because of postponement of meetings of the Philomathean Society for weeks at a time, members had lost interest. And finally, because a student could be expelled for five demerit marks, this meant that he or she could be expelled for something as minor as whispering ten times. "These rules," the handbill concluded, "seem to us as unfit for anything but the primary departments. . . . Scholars are continually expelled and knowing the nature of the crime (whispering ten times) we will leave it to the public to decide as to the justice of the punishments."

In reply to these and other accusations, Leo ran a story with the flamboyant headline "School House on the Hill Contains Its Own Defender Who Comes Forward After Repeated Public and Personal Insults and Flays the Braying Ass Who Has No More Manliness of Character Than to Make War Upon Women and Assail the Repute of Our Best Schools." He told his readers that there was no excuse for the series of "insulting and unfounded publica-



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The man on the balcony is believed to be Henry H. Shepard, surveying Mason City in 1874 from his fruit and confections store. By the time he and Leo Chapman locked horns in the mid 1880s, Shepard had served as county auditor for ten years and was on the board of education.

tions" that had appeared during the past several weeks, and that he had been deluged with requests from indignant parents and pupils asking him to answer the "miserable tirade." Seeing himself as Carrie's defender, Leo said he had intended to answer the charges against her, had she not "proved her independence of assistance" by writing her own defense.

Carrie, in responding to her critics, expressed her resentment of the recent insinuations of mismanagement of the schools, especially those in a recent attack in the *Times*. Rather than deferring to Leo for her defense, she raged, "No intelligent woman could read that article and not feel that she had been slapped in the face by the editor. If the editors of the *Times* and the *Express* desire to assail me as principal of the schools, I have no objection and would gladly welcome any investigation which they may see fit to organize." But as a staunch feminist she demanded that "any investigation should be made upon her work as principal of the schools, and not as a woman." She pointed out that the editor of the *Times* had never visited the Mason City schools, "and thus, by personal inspection knows nothing of their faults." Furthermore, judging from his spelling and grammar, she asserted, he could scarcely be considered a qualified critic of an educational institution.

Carrie explained that because few persons had bothered to visit the schools, she had taken the trouble to appoint the lay committee to oversee the mid-term examinations and "bear witness to the public that the schools were doing thorough work." Appended to her letter was an endorsement of her methods signed by the seven committee members. "It is not possi-

ble that the testimony of these ladies and gentlemen should be impeached by a man who knows nothing of what he is talking," she said in a final jab.

In the school column of the same issue of the *Republican*, Carrie also defended the noon-hour rules that were under attack. She denied that children were not permitted to talk above a whisper during lunch, or that they didn't have time to get water to drink with their meals. "If any child eats without a drink of water it is because he [*sic*] prefers to do so. There are plenty of dippers in which water may be carried to the rooms during the ten-minute free time," she explained. "Though the lunch-time rules may be rigid," she said, "any right-minded person will admit they are necessary. Parents should realize that it is impossible to control 600 children in one school building without regulations."

In view of the controversy over Carrie's strictness, the 1884 senior class motto seems particularly appropriate. It read, "We have fought the good fight. We have finished the course." This class was graduated that summer in accordance with the time-honored, elaborate customs of Mason City. The three boys wore dark suits and the nine girls wore white dresses. A floral umbrella hung over the stage, and a bank of flowers filled the back of the platform. The auditorium was packed to overflowing with more than eight hundred well-wishers. Many of them showered the girls with flowers "in endless variety and great profusion," the *Republican* reported, "until at the close it was said that this was the most elaborate display of flowers which had ever been seen in the city." At the conclusion of the graduation ceremonies, Carrie was presented with a pair of mother-of-pearl opera glasses. She was so overcome by the laudatory presentation speech that she was unable to respond.

The 1884 graduation ceremonies marked the end of Carrie's association with the Mason City schools. Her biographer and close friend Mary Gray Peck would later imply that Carrie resigned her position because of her pending marriage. In fact, it seems quite certain that Carrie was fired—due in large part to the efforts of Henry Shepard, a member of both the Mason City board of education and the Cerro Gordo County board of supervisors.

Shepard, who opposed Carrie's policies, had been elected to a seat on the three-member school board the previous March in a hotly contested election against Carrie's friend James B. Dakin. In 1981 Robert Shepard, Henry's grandson, would write, "According to stories within my family, Carrie Chapman did not resign her position with the Mason City school system. Rather, she was fired and I suspect my grandfather was active in terminating her employment." This assumption seems plausible in light of the enmity that would surface again between Shepard and Carrie and Leo Chapman.

DURING THE SUMMER of 1884 Carrie took a month-long trip to Alaska with a group of teachers and then returned to her parents' home near Charles City. She taught in teachers' institutes during the late summer and fall. On February 12, 1885, she and Leo were married at her parents' home. They returned to Mason City the same day and set up housekeeping in rooms over Leo's office.

On March 5, Leo announced that Carrie Lane Chapman was now a co-editor of the *Republican* and that henceforth she would be equally associated with him in all departments of the paper. Carrie soon instituted a column titled "Woman's World," which was devoted to material related to women's rights. It was patterned after the women's column by Elizabeth Boynton Harbert in the Chicago *Inter Ocean*, which she had read in her parents' home as a young girl.

In her column that year, Carrie discussed a variety of subjects ranging from arguments for woman suffrage to the need for reform dress for women who worked outside the home. She told her readers at length about the Woman's Congress in Des Moines in early October, where for the first time she had met Iowa suffrage leaders and listened to such nationally

known women as Julia Ward Howe, author of the *Battle Hymn of the Republic*, and Frances Willard, suffragist and president of the Women's Christian Temperance Union. She also reported on the Iowa Woman Suffrage Association convention, which she attended in Cedar Rapids in late October. [For excerpts from these columns, see *The Palimpsest* Sept./Oct. 1981.]

This was her first involvement with the organized suffrage movement, and she came home so inspired that she headed a petition campaign in her community asking the Iowa General Assembly to grant women the right to vote in municipal elections. In later years Carrie recalled that petitions were signed by all but ten women in Mason City, and she liked to cite this successful campaign to refute the accusation that women did not want the vote. (Actually the number of signatures may have been less than Carrie claimed. Records of the 1886 General Assembly show that on February 12 the Senate was presented with a petition signed by 235 Mason City women. In a town of 3,000 there were certainly more women than that.)

In addition to her women's column, an occasional story in the *Republican* is so distinctively Carrie's that one does not hesitate to attribute it to her. One such article is the vehement defense of the elaborate graduation ceremonies of the Mason City high school. In the spring of 1885 the school board had adopted a resolution—at the suggestion of Henry Shepard—that discouraged "display of dress or profusion of flowers in graduating exercises." Carrie argued that "no parent is so poor that he [*sic*] cannot provide his [*sic*] daughter with a white dress. . . . As to flowers—to treat the subject seriously would be ridiculous! Why have a public graduation if you don't want a public display? . . . The Mason City girls need not be alarmed," Carrie assured them, "their tributes of sweet flowers will fall at their feet just as though there was no stupid bigot on the school board."

The *Express* reported that Carrie's "malicious" attack on Shepard had "awakened universal condemnation throughout the city and the county." The paper defended Shepard as "one of the best members of the school board,

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Henry Shepard, in the opinion of the Mason City *Express*, was "the most consistent, clear-headed officer the district or county has ever had." Carrie, on the other hand, called him "a stupid bigot." Leo soon entered the battle between his wife and Shepard.

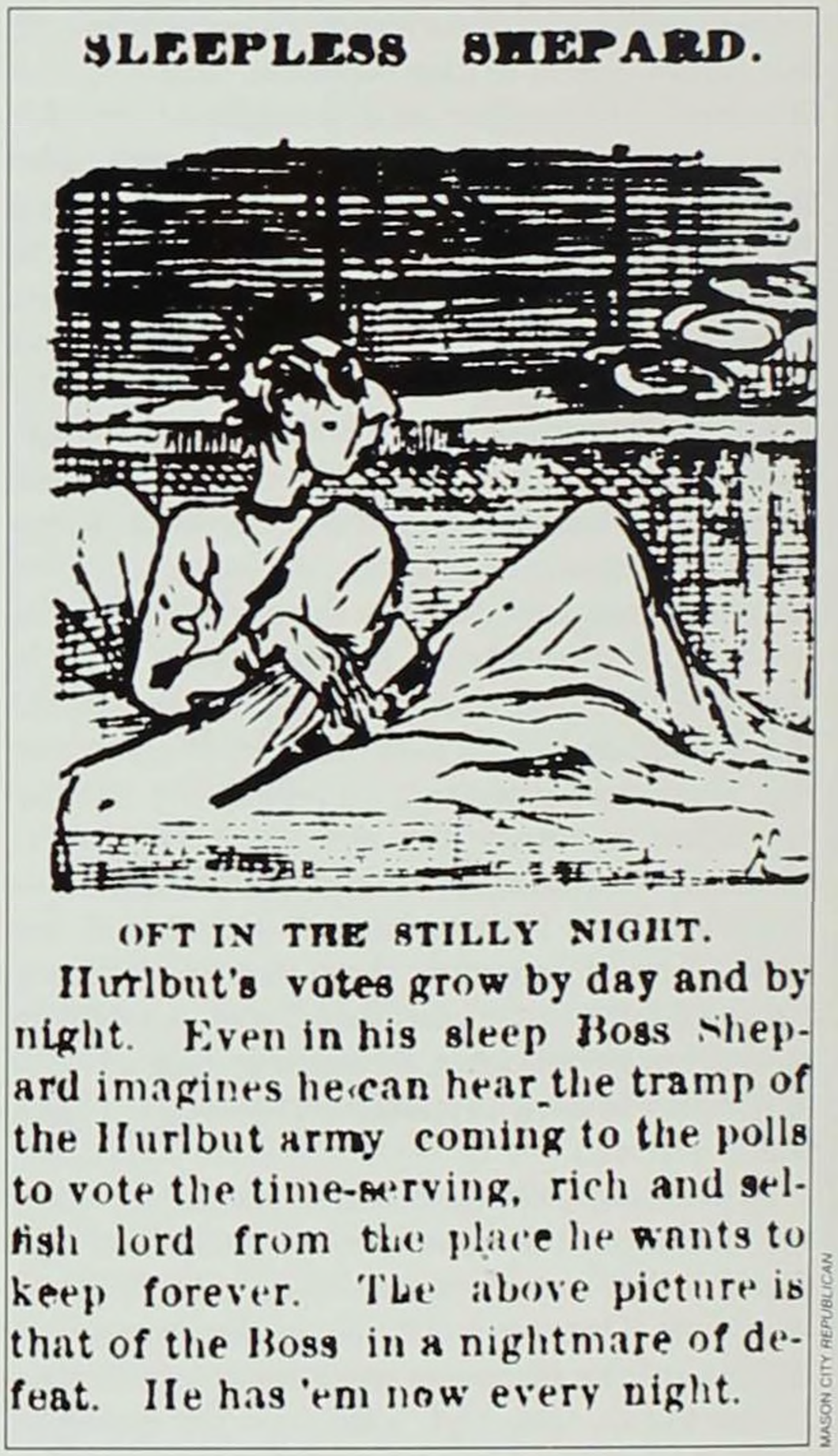
and the most consistent, clear-headed officer the district or county has ever had." It considered Carrie's attack "outrageously unjust" and "clearly born of spite."

This time Carrie was on the winning side. In the June 25 *Republican* she reported that at the graduation ceremonies "the young ladies"—including Shepard's daughter, Ella—"were all dressed in white," and that "there never had been such a profusion of flowers."

AS THE FALL 1885 elections approached, Leo Chapman campaigned for Carrie's nomination for county superintendent of schools, this time on the Republican ticket. Since politics still was purely a male domain, it would have been unseemly for Carrie to actively campaign in her own behalf, and so she remained a

silent bystander in the battle for her nomination. Leo is reported to have declared that Carrie must be nominated as a "political necessity . . . and that she is sure of the nomination."

Yet another newspaper, the *Times*, could find "no necessity for Leo's feminine paragon of intellectuality. . . . The candidate must not be so self-opinionated as to hold himself [*sic*] above our [teachers'] institutes or to consider our admirable core of teachers beneath him [*sic*] because they are not college bred." In addition, the *Times* noted, any candidate for superintendent must be physically strong enough to visit schools in bad weather. These comments reflect resentment over Carrie's vigorous intellect and college education in an era when very few girls and even fewer boys were graduated from high school. It also reflects the perennial sexist argument that women are not physically strong enough to hold jobs usually filled by males, the same argument that Carrie had faced when she became superintendent of the Mason City schools.



Political caricatures, like this one in editor Leo Chapman's *Republican*, skewered incumbent Henry Shepard in his race against C. L. Hurlbut for county auditor.

CARRIE'S CANDIDACY brought on a heated political battle in Cerro Gordo County. The man who led the fight against her nomination was her old enemy Henry Shepard, known locally as a man who had never encountered an obstacle he could not overcome. Shepard, a Republican, had been county auditor for the past ten years and was currently a candidate for reelection. His forces packed the Republican nominating convention in early September by bringing in an estimated 135 Democrats as Republican delegates, actually outnumbering the regular Republicans present. (Because women could not vote, there were no women present.)

One man later reported that although he was not a Republican he had been urged to go to the convention "to vote against the woman." He had refused to do so. Others, however, did not refuse. According to the Clear Lake *Mirror*, delegates were "well trained and drilled . . . and prepared to rise up at the whistle of their bosses."

Carrie lost the nomination, but the stacked convention nevertheless caused an uproar within the Republican party. "Never before has there been such widespread protest and indignation," commented the *Mirror*. Disgruntled Republicans decided to call a new convention for mid-September. Carrie was again defeated after a bitter fight, and the nomination for county schools superintendent went to A. W. Weir of Clear Lake.

Shepard had antagonized so many people by

his strong-arm methods at the first convention that a group of Republicans recruited C. L. Hurlbut to run as an independent against incumbent Shepherd for county auditor. Hurlbut was subsequently endorsed by the Democrats as well.

Incensed over Carrie's defeat at both nominating conventions, Leo vigorously supported Hurlbut and even more vigorously opposed Shepard. Leo advised "all men who believe that ten years in office is long enough for any man to fill his pockets and feather his nest" to vote for Hurlbut. He claimed that Shepard had "never done a single thing for the Republican party but to sit in that Auditor's office and wear out the bottoms of chairs while he grew rich." Shepard was "a ring boss who desired to keep the office indefinitely that he may manipulate county funds to their interest," Leo ranted. "He is a typically selfish man working every issue to put money in his own pocket . . . he has never given one cent toward the upbuilding of the county . . . he is an ungentlemanly officer and a dishonorable politician." The September and October *Republican* is peppered with unflattering caricatures of Shepard and derogatory verse. One is a cartoon of a hog sitting at a desk, which Leo captioned "Shepard Swilling Swag."

Other Republican papers in the area, however, supported Shepard. The Hampton *Recorder* warned Leo that "when a young man gets to that degree of self-conceit that he thinks he knows more than his party and sets up in business for himself . . . he is in a mighty fair way to get an addition to his education applied in a manner that is more forcible than pleasing." The *Express* called Leo a "becrazed editor" and commented that the current campaign showed "the length of folly to which personal spite arising from disappointed personal ambition may drive a man." The paper observed that it was "strange that not one of the bitter assailants has ever presumed to charge Shepard with any dereliction of duty or malfeasance in office. Nor will they."

Leo responded to the challenge of the *Express* in an article titled "On the Make." He accused Shepard of manipulating county funds so that there had been insufficient cash the previous winter for the county to redeem warrants issued to the poor for the purchase of coal. He contended that Shepard did this so that "he and his associates could make a nice little speck by discounting the warrants"—a practice in which the auditor would buy the warrants from the holders for less than their face value and then collect their full value from the county. This was a misdemeanor under Iowa law. In spite of Leo's attacks, Shepard defeated Hurlbut—but only by a plurality of seventeen votes.

A FEW WEEKS after the election, while Leo was vacationing in New Orleans, the Cerro Gordo County Grand Jury indicted him for criminal libel because of his article accusing Shepard of redeeming warrants at a discount. Criminal libel is a charge used when a jail sentence and not simply money damages are sought, and it must be filed by the state and not an individual. This type of charge left Shepard free to deny that he had anything to do with the indictment.

In a story headlined "Leo's Buzz becomes a Boomerang," the *Times* commented that Leo had "made a political difference a personal quarrel . . . manfully standing his ground despite the protestation of friends and the threats of enemies."

"Will he again assume control of the *Republican*?" the *Times* asked Carrie. "Why of course," she replied, "He knew nothing of this matter when he left . . . and when he returns he will doubtless speak for himself." It is interesting to note that this is the only time during the entire brouhaha over Carrie's campaign for county superintendent of schools that she is quoted either directly or indirectly in the Mason City papers. Furthermore, when she was finally interviewed during Leo's absence, she thought it more appropriate to wait and let him speak in his own behalf.

A bench warrant for Leo's arrest was served after his return and he posted bail of $200. He told his readers that although Shepard's friends

claimed Shepard "would not stoop so low as to seek private redress for alleged personal injury in the name of the State at the expense of the taxpayers of the county," Leo had reasons for believing the contrary. He also asserted that the indictment had been obtained in a very secretive way just before the grand jury was about to be dismissed and while he was out of town. He termed it a "desperate though puny effort of political persecutors to call the great state of Iowa to their assistance in their efforts to rule or ruin" him.

Leo claimed the indictment was the climax of political spite-work intended to injure the business of the paper, and that it was of no importance "save the inconvenience and slight expense it may bring." Humorously announcing that the *Republican* would be the only paper in the United States to "contain a full, official and authentic report of all the proceedings," he advised his readers that "now is the time to subscribe!" No doubt Carrie shared her husband's indignation over his arrest, but there is no indication of any public statement by her. Unfortunately there is also no extant file of the 1886 *Republican*, so it is impossible to get Leo's version of events after December 1885.

At a March 16, 1886, hearing in district court, Leo entered a demurrer on the basis that the indictment was improperly drawn. The judge overruled the demurrer, and it was understood that Leo would stand trial during the current term of court. Then, on April 21 the *Times* announced that Leo had severed his connection with the *Republican* with the previous week's issue. L. L. Klinefelter, former county superintendent of schools, was the new owner of the *Republican* and within a short time it was merged with the Mason City *Express*.

One can assume that Leo was the victim of a forced sale. By the April 21 announcement he had already gone to California; the *Times*, tongue-in-cheek, sincerely regretted that failing health had caused his departure to a less vigorous climate. A week later the *Times* warned the new owner of the *Republican* not to "stumble into the pitfall that so completely and speedily engulfed his predecessors that their trumpeted coming was only equalled by their funereal departure." Observing that Leo and Carrie had "flashed as the rocket and fell as the stick," the *Times* advised the new owner to "leave shaping the city and its destiny to the good old pioneers and their sons."

There is no record of Leo's case ever having come to trial. When he went to San Francisco the charge against him was still pending. The case was dismissed the following October.

THIS PERIOD of Carrie's life is glossed over by Carrie's friend Mary Gray Peck in her 1944 biography of Carrie (published three years before Carrie's death). Peck's version is that "the experiment of editing the *Mason City Republican* had been so successful that the Chapmans determined to undertake a larger project, and when the opportunity to dispose of the paper came his way, Mr. Chapman, in the spring of 1886 sold it. He felt that there was opportunity for journalistic enterprise on the Pacific Coast, and in the summer he went there to look over the field with the intention of buying a paper if he found a favorable opening."

Carrie, who left Mason City at the same time as Leo, went back to her parents' farm, where she waited for him to establish himself again. In August she received a telegram informing her that Leo was desperately ill with typhoid fever. She started for California immediately, but Leo died before she arrived.

Carrie stayed on in California for about a year after Leo's death and worked for a San Francisco newspaper. However, in the fall of 1887 she returned to Iowa, determined to devote her efforts to the enfranchisement of women. She earned her living by lecturing on temperance and women's rights, and she soon became involved in organizational work for the Iowa Woman Suffrage Association. She moved away from the state in 1890 at the time of her marriage to George Catt, a well-to-do construction engineer whom she had known in college. Ten years later she would be chosen by Susan B. Anthony to be her successor as president of the National American Woman Suffrage Association. Carrie's leadership of the woman-suffrage forces ended in 1920 with the ratification

of the Nineteenth Amendment to the federal constitution, conferring on women the right to vote. Carrie then went on to work for world peace.

AS THE YEARS WENT BY and Carrie became more prominent on the national scene, the Mason City newspapers grew increasingly proud to claim her as one of their own. However, they carefully avoided any mention that Carrie and Leo, in effect, had been run out of town by their political enemies.

By 1897 Carrie had already achieved sufficient prominence in the national woman-suffrage movement for the Mason City newspapers to revise their attitudes about her. The *Republican* recalled that "she was a young lady possessed of superior ability and winning manners so friends were not surprised at her success as a public speaker and organizer. Those who heard her speak at the recent convention felt some pride in the masterly way she presented the demands of women. . . . Her manner of speaking is so perfect . . . that she holds her audience as with a charm. Mason City and the State of Iowa are proud of having produced such a woman as Carrie Lane Chapman Catt. . . . [She] is held in very high esteem by the people of Mason City. . . . From the day she entered school work here, there was always a desire to push ahead. . . . Many regard her as the most talented and the most level headed worker today."

Two years later the Mason City *Globe Gazette* praised Carrie as "fortune favored." The paper went on to say that "she possesses both physical charm and intellectual endowments. With the wholesomeness of good health, and with a voice while clear and strong and resonant is never masculine, Mrs. Catt is well equipped to talk woman's rights. . . . Time has been good to Mrs. Catt. Always regarded as a handsome woman, she is more charming than ever. . . . She has lost none of the positiveness of character and conviction that marked her when she was superintendent of schools here and won her fight with the school board to banish flowers and other extravagance on graduation day." (Actually, Carrie's stand on graduation extravagances had been the exact opposite of what the *Globe Gazette* recalled.)

The change in public opinion as expressed by the newspapers is so distinct that one who reads these later accounts would never suspect that fifteen years earlier she had been criticized and later fired for her school reforms; accused of bringing women's rights issues into the schools; and defeated at a convention deliberately stacked against her. This shift in local opinion would continue.

In May 1916 Carrie Lane Chapman Catt returned to Mason City to campaign for woman suffrage in Iowa. By now she was an internationally known and respected woman. In sharp contrast to her "funereal departure" thirty years before, she was now "given a most royal welcome." The Cecil Theater, where she spoke, was decorated with American flags and yellow suffrage banners and bunting. Every seat was taken and the walls were lined with more men and women willing to stand during the entire two-hour program. Even so, "scores of people were turned away at the door."

The *Globe Gazette* gave extensive coverage to Carrie's visit in 1916. And again there is no hint that Carrie's experiences in Mason City thirty years earlier had been far from positive. Crediting Mason City with starting Carrie "on her road to greatness," the newspaper recounted that here "she was for four years superintendent of schools." (Actually Carrie had taught in the Mason City school system three years, during one of which she also served as superintendent.) "Hundreds of ladies and gentlemen . . . have delighted . . . to refer back to the time when Miss Lane was their teacher.

"Here," the *Globe Gazette* continued, "her ability as a public speaker was first recognized. On a good many occasions she appeared before societies and clubs for addresses and so brilliant were her utterances . . . that it was not long before she was in demand . . . throughout the country.

"Here she started out on her successful political career" when she was nominated for county superintendent of schools by the Democrats, the paper explained. "Miss Lane hesitated a long

time on the question of accepting or rejecting the nomination and after several conferences with Democratic and Republican delegations, she decided she would not run." (No mention is made of her subsequent unsuccessful try for this position on the Republican ticket.)

"Here she worked as a journalist following her marriage to Leo Chapman," the *Globe Gazette* continued. "She was brilliant and forcible in her editorial utterances and what she wrote commanded attention throughout the state. Had she remained in newspaper work she would have achieved as much prominence as she had in the political world."

The *Globe Gazette* lauded Carrie as a "woman who stands for nobleness and everything that is pure in womanhood." "Those who heard Mrs. Catt," the paper concluded, "are proud to claim her as their own."

CARRIE'S APOTHEOSIS in the local press was now complete. Once attacked snidely as a self-opinionated "paragon of intellectuality," she now was remembered as a "brilliant and forcible" woman who stood for "nobleness." Once lambasted for her bold efforts to solve academic and discipline problems in an overcrowded school, she was now recalled with delight by "hundreds" of her former pupils. The local press that had written of Leo and Carrie's "funereal departure" in 1886 now claimed that Mason City had set Carrie "on her road to greatness." Yet no mention is made of Carrie's impassioned defender, her first husband and co-editor. The local newspapers now preferred to leave Leo Chapman—as well as the political battles that drove the couple out of town—hidden in the mist of history.

Carrie continues to be remembered by Iowans for her victories rather than her losses. Twenty-eight years after her death, Carrie was one of the first women elected to the Iowa Women's Hall of Fame in 1975. In 1992 she was the posthumous recipient of the Iowa Award, which recognizes outstanding service of nationwide import by Iowa citizens. The same year Iowa State University established the Carrie Chapman Catt Center for Women in Politics. In her early adult years in Mason City, Iowa, however, the accolades were absent, and the victories were few. In fact, by following events in the 1880s local press, we see Carrie Lane Chapman Catt as a capable, ambitious, brash, and embattled young woman who failed to realize the limits of community tolerance for her school reforms. There is little to indicate that she would develop into a leader famous for her consummate tact and political skill. □

NOTE ON SOURCES

This account has been pieced together from the incomplete news files of the following Mason City papers: the *Republican*, owned and edited by Carrie's husband, Leo Chapman; the *Express*, also a Republican paper; the *Times*, a politically independent paper owned and edited by a Democrat; and the *Globe Gazette*. Excerpts from Catt's column in the *Republican* appear in Teresa Opheim's "The Woman's World: Carrie Lane Chapman in the Mason City *Republican*," *Palimpsest* (Sept./Oct. 1981). Catt's 1885 Mason City suffrage petition campaign is detailed in a letter from Catt to Mary Ankeny Hunter (State Historical Society of Iowa manuscript collections, Des Moines). A copy of the "Nostrae Scholae" handbill was given to the author by James Collison of Mason City. Robert Shepard's remarks are from his letter to the author, 19 Oct. 1981. Court records verify Leo's legal difficulties, including *State of Iowa* v. *Leo Chapman*: Subpoena issued to Henry Shepard and three other men, 27 Feb. 1886; Demurrer (n.d.); case dismissed Oct. 8, 1886.

Biographical information about Leo Chapman comes primarily from the 1883 *History of Cerro Gordo and Franklin Counties* and the Mason City *Times* (24 June 1885).

Secondary sources include: Mary Gray Peck, *Carrie Chapman Catt: A Biography* (New York, 1944); Jacqueline Van Voris, *Carrie Chapman Catt: A Public Life* (New York, 1989); and Louise Noun, *Strong-Minded Women* (Ames, 1969). An earlier version of this article is in the Grinnell College library; a portion of it appeared in the *Des Moines Register* (Oct. 18, 1981). Annotations to this article are held in *Palimpsest* production files.